

Appl. No. 09/902,440
Amdt. dated Jul. 23, 04
Reply to Office Action of April 23, 2004.

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Claim 1 (withdrawn): A locking apparatus for a gooseneck trailer hitch, the gooseneck trailer hitch having a tubular sheathing member, a stationary plate fixedly attached to the sheathing member, the stationary plate having a cavity for receiving a hitch ball and a flange with a first aperture for receiving a latch pin, a lock plate pivotally connected to the stationary plate, the lock plate having a second aperture for receiving a hitch ball, a retainer bracket fixedly attached to the lock plate, the retainer bracket having a central opening in which the flange of the stationary plate is slidably disposed, the retainer bracket further having a third aperture for receiving a latch pin, a handle guide depending from the sheathing member, a handle slidably disposed in the handle guide, the handle having a latch pin capable of insertion into the first aperture of the stationary plate and the third aperture of the retainer bracket to immobilize the lock plate in a closed position in which the second aperture of the lock plate is partially misaligned with the cavity of the stationary plate such that a hitch ball is prevented from being inserted into or removed from the cavity, said locking apparatus comprising:

a lock pin having a shaft and an eyelet, said shaft being capable of insertion into the central opening of the retainer bracket; and

a lock having a hasp, said lock being positionable in a locked position in which said hasp captures said eyelet and the handle of the gooseneck trailer hitch;

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wherein, when said lock is in said locked position, said shaft is not removable from the central opening of the retainer bracket and the lock plate is substantially immobilized in the closed position.

Claim 2 (withdrawn): The locking apparatus of claim 1 wherein said shaft has a diameter of about 7/16 inch.

Claim 3 (withdrawn): The locking apparatus of claim 1 wherein said shaft is substantially linear and has a length of about 4 inches.

Claim 4 (withdrawn): The locking apparatus of claim 1 wherein said shaft comprises a bend, the retainer bracket further comprises a fourth aperture providing access into the central opening of the retainer bracket, and said shaft is insertable through the fourth aperture into the central opening of the retainer bracket such that said bend prevents removal of said shaft from the retainer bracket when said lock is in said locked position.

Claim 5 (withdrawn): A locking apparatus for a gooseneck trailer hitch, the gooseneck trailer hitch having a tubular sheathing member, a stationary plate fixedly attached to the sheathing member, the stationary plate having a cavity for receiving a hitch ball and a flange with a first aperture for receiving a latch pin, a lock plate pivotally connected to the stationary plate, the lock plate having a second aperture for receiving a hitch ball, a retainer bracket fixedly attached to the lock plate, the retainer bracket having a central opening in which the flange of the stationary plate is slidably disposed, the retainer bracket further having a third aperture for receiving a latch pin, a handle guide depending from the sheathing member, a handle slidably disposed in the handle guide, the handle having a latch pin capable of insertion into the first aperture of the stationary plate and the third aperture of the retainer bracket to immobilize the

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lock plate in a closed position in which the second aperture of the lock plate is partially misaligned with the cavity of the stationary plate such that a hitch ball is prevented from being inserted into or removed from the cavity, a cover plate depending from the sheathing member and enshrouding the handle guide, the cover plate having a first wall with a fourth aperture and a second wall with a fifth aperture generally aligned with the fourth aperture, said locking apparatus comprising:

a lock pin having a shaft and an eyelet, said shaft being capable of insertion through the fourth and fifth apertures of the cover plate; and

a lock having a hasp, said lock being positionable in a locked position in which said hasp captures said eyelet and the handle of the gooseneck trailer hitch;

wherein, when said lock is in said locked position, said shaft is not removable from the fourth and fifth apertures of the cover plate and the lock plate is substantially immobilized in the closed position.

Claim 6 (withdrawn): The locking apparatus of claim 5 wherein said shaft has a diameter of about 7/16 inch.

Claim 7 (withdrawn): The locking apparatus of claim 5 wherein said shaft is substantially linear and has a length of about 6 inches.

Claims 8-11 (canceled).

Claim 12 (withdrawn): A method of locking a gooseneck trailer hitch, the gooseneck trailer hitch having a tubular sheathing member, a stationary plate fixedly attached to the sheathing member, the stationary plate having a cavity for receiving a hitch ball and a flange with a first aperture for receiving a latch pin, a lock plate pivotally connected to the stationary plate,

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the lock plate having a second aperture for receiving a hitch ball, a retainer bracket fixedly attached to the lock plate, the retainer bracket having a central opening in which the flange of the stationary plate is slidably disposed, the retainer bracket further having a third aperture for receiving a latch pin, a handle guide depending from the sheathing member, a handle slidably disposed in the handle guide, the handle having a latch pin capable of insertion into the first aperture of the stationary plate and the third aperture of the retainer bracket to immobilize the lock plate in a closed position in which the second aperture of the lock plate is partially misaligned with the cavity of the stationary plate such that a hitch ball is prevented from being inserted into or removed from the cavity, said method comprising:

placing the lock plate in the closed position;

inserting a lock pin into the central opening of the retainer bracket, the lock pin having a shaft and an eyelet, said shaft being at least partially disposed within the central opening of the retainer bracket;

positioning the handle of the gooseneck trailer hitch in close proximity to said eyelet;

providing a lock having a hasp;

passing said hasp through said eyelet and the handle of the gooseneck trailer hitch; and

closing said hasp such that said shaft is not removable from the central opening of the retainer bracket and the lock plate is substantially immobilized in the closed position.

Claim 13 (withdrawn): The method of claim 12 further comprising the step of forming a fourth aperture in the retainer bracket, said fourth aperture providing access into the central opening of the retainer bracket;

wherein said shaft comprises a bend; and

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wherein said inserting step comprises inserting said shaft through said fourth aperture into the central opening of the retainer bracket such that said bend prevents removal of said shaft from the retainer bracket when said hasp is closed.

Claim 14 (withdrawn): A method of locking a gooseneck trailer hitch, the gooseneck trailer hitch having a tubular sheathing member, a stationary plate fixedly attached to the sheathing member, the stationary plate having a cavity for receiving a hitch ball and a flange with a first aperture for receiving a latch pin, a lock plate pivotally connected to the stationary plate, the lock plate having a second aperture for receiving a hitch ball, a retainer bracket fixedly attached to the lock plate, the retainer bracket having a central opening in which the flange of the stationary plate is slidably disposed, the retainer bracket further having a third aperture for receiving a latch pin, a handle guide depending from the sheathing member, a handle slidably disposed in the handle guide, the handle having a latch pin capable of insertion into the first aperture of the stationary plate and the third aperture of the retainer bracket to immobilize the lock plate in a closed position in which the second aperture of the lock plate is partially misaligned with the cavity of the stationary plate such that a hitch ball is prevented from being inserted into or removed from the cavity, and a cover plate depending from the sheathing member and enshrouding the handle guide, the cover plate having a first wall and a second wall, said method comprising:

forming a fourth aperture in the first wall of the cover plate;

forming a fifth aperture in the second wall of the cover plate, said fifth aperture being generally aligned with said fourth aperture;

placing the lock plate in the closed position;

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providing a lock pin having a shaft and an eyelet;
inserting said shaft through said fourth and fifth apertures;
positioning the handle of the gooseneck trailer hitch in close proximity to said eyelet;
providing a lock having a hasp;
passing said hasp through said eyelet and the handle of the gooseneck trailer hitch; and
closing said hasp such that said shaft is not removable from said fourth and fifth apertures
and the lock plate is substantially immobilized in the closed position.

Claim 15-21 (canceled).

Claim 22 (new): A combined locking apparatus and gooseneck trailer hitch, said
combination comprising:

the gooseneck trailer hitch comprising:

a tubular member;
a handle slidably mounted to said tubular member, said handle having a latch pin;
a receiving plate fixed to said tubular member, said receiving plate defining a
cavity for receiving a hitch ball and having a flange defining a first aperture for receiving
said latch pin;
a lock plate pivotally connected to said receiving plate, said lock plate defining a
second aperture for receiving said hitch ball; and
a retainer bracket fixed to said lock plate, said retainer bracket defining a slot in
which said flange of said stationary plate is slidably disposed, said retainer bracket further
defining a third aperture for receiving said latch pin;

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wherein said latch pin is inserted into said third aperture of said retainer bracket and said first aperture of said stationary plate to immobilize said lock plate in a closed position in which said second aperture of said lock plate is misaligned with said cavity, thereby preventing insertion or removal of said hitch ball from said cavity;
a bar disposed in said slot of said retainer bracket adjacent said flange of said stationary plate; and

a lock body locking said bar in said slot of said retainer bracket;
thereby substantially immobilizing said lock plate within said slot.

Claim 23 (new). The combination of claim 22 wherein said bar traps said handle upon insertion of said bar into said slot of said retainer bracket.

Claim 24 (new). The combination of claim 22 wherein said lock body is key operated and fixable on a first end of said bar.

Claim 25 (new). The combination of claim 22 wherein said lock body is combination code operated and fixable on a first end of said bar.

Claim 26 (new). The combination of claim 23 wherein said lock body is key operated and fixable on first and second ends of said bar, wherein said bar is "U" shaped and traps said handle prior to fixing said lock body on said bar.

Claim 27 (new). The combination of claim 23 wherein said lock body is combination code operated and fixable on first and second ends of said bar, wherein said bar is "U" shaped and traps said handle prior to fixing said lock body on said bar.